

BUILDING PROJECTS X 3 --

HOW DID WE DO IT?

by Sandy Petrie



The Noble County Public Library (NCPL) just completed three very different building projects and did it with relative ease. So, how did this three facility system serving 10 of the 14 taxing townships in Noble County make it happen? They did it with much prior planning and some really great staff.

Sandy Petrie, the director of NCPL, highlights some of the key elements that made the actual building process smooth and relatively stress free.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Central Library in Albion – The project here involved completing and renovating a 25,000 square foot library originally built in 1995. Several meeting rooms and an activity room were added to the lower level. On the upper level the children's area was walled off, a young adult area created, the staff area was renovated, and the genealogy room was expanded. The library remained open during construction.

West Branch in Cromwell – This renovation involved the entire two story, 8,000 square foot building. Many elements of the original opera house were preserved to include some of the tin ceiling, the stage

area, and the original dressing rooms and walls on which several years of play casts are written. Also, some of the original opera seating was kept. The skylight was not re-opened, but the effect was maintained with creative lighting and the potential to re-open it at a later time. The library was moved to a temporary location during construction.

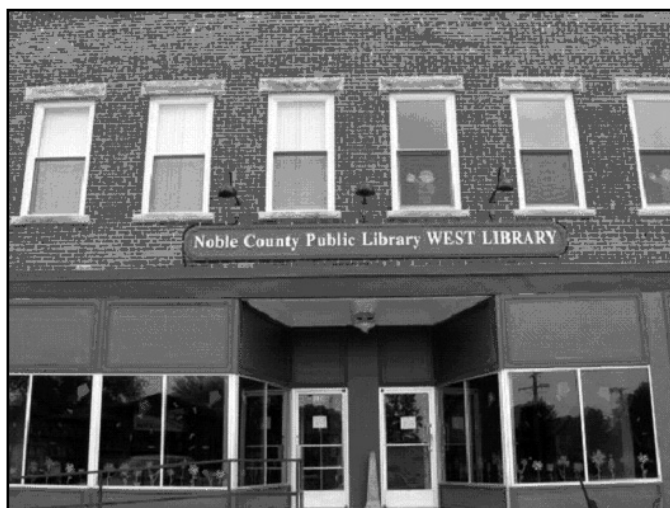
East Branch in Avilla – This project involved construction of a new 12,500 square foot facility located in a beautiful park setting. The library remained at its existing location during construction.

BACKGROUND

In 1995, our Central Library was built after much conflict and controversy, but with the determination of Linda Shultz, the director at the time, a dedicated board, and a few amazing citizens, the seemingly impossible became possible. Many things were sacrificed in order to just get the building built, one of which was choosing not to finish the lower level. Over the years since that time, we have been discussing and planning a way to not only finish the Central Library but improve conditions at the branches on the east and west sides of the county. The West branch was a one



Noble County Public Library: Central Library in Albion



Noble County Public Library: West Branch Library in Cromwell

level 2,000 square foot storefront property being leased for use as a library, and the East branch was in a 1,500 square foot old school house that had been modified for use as a library. Both locations were bursting at the seams, and the East Branch was forced to hold storytime and make crafts on the floor due to lack of space.

In 2001, the library board purchased the building that had previously been leased for the West Branch in Cromwell. This building was originally built in 1910 as the community opera house and, even though significant damage from a roof that had gone un-repaired for years existed, there were elements of the opera house that remained.

In 2003, the library board purchased, for a new East branch, a 3 acre portion of a 25 acre wooded parcel of land within the town of Avilla that was owned by the town. The remaining portion of the property was sold to the Avilla park board to be used as a nature park.

The pieces were finally in place to begin planning new and renovated facilities but, prior to this time, there was much turmoil over where the libraries should be located and much conflict among the library board, park board, town board, and several citizens. These issues were resolved by library staff and trustees being patient and open to ideas and suggestions.

There are many reasons why the actual building process went smoothly, but the three key elements that made it work were an excellent team of people, outstanding communication, and organized documentation.

THE TEAM

The library staff kept the library operational through this entire process. The library chose not to

have a construction manager so those duties fell on me as the director. I could not have done it without knowing the staff had day-to-day operations well in hand. The library board was also amazing and united and dedicated to success from the beginning. They knew that it was important to get experienced people for the project and set out determined to hire the best. The architect - George Morrison of Morrison Kattman Menze; the financial advisors - H. J. Umbaugh and Associates; and the bond council - Ice Miller; were all chosen in large part due to their years of experience, specifically with library projects.

THE COMMUNICATION

Once decisions were made, there was little controversy, dissent, or negative comments. This was due to the more than 30 community meetings held during a period of about 9 months. The library published booklets that included pictures of the current situation, a calendar of meetings, and a map of the taxing area served. The first community meetings were held by a local facilitator from each of the three communities and were designed to just get ideas and input for the libraries with no influence from the library board or staff. The following meetings were held by board and staff members to get an understanding of community needs and building ideas. It wasn't until after these initial meetings that an architect was even hired. The remaining meetings took place to get feedback on initial designs and inform taxpayers of the tax impact.

By advertising these meetings constantly in newspapers, on flyers, on utility bills, and on copy change signs throughout the community, we avoided any major conflicts. Not only were all three communities well informed of what was happening, but they had ample opportunity to state their opinions and concerns. This process also played a large role in getting the Department of Local Government of Finance to approve the project and bond funding.

THE DOCUMENTATION

Something that truly helped keep things straight for me as director is that early in the process I started a running timeline that noted significant events and the dates they occurred. I also created four Excel spreadsheets that tracked all financial transactions since the beginning. One spreadsheet was used to track bond money, another listed every single invoice and which fund was used to pay it, another listed all donations and pledges, and a final spreadsheet separated each of the three building projects with projected and actual costs.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I was quite apprehensive about tackling all three building projects at the same time, but I am quite



Noble County Public Library: East Branch Library in Avilla

pleased with how the process and finished projects turned out. Even though the entire process went smoothly with very few glitches, it was a great deal of work and stress did build up on the library board and staff. One important component was to remind ourselves there is no perfect building. As long as we remembered that, we did not get worked up over the small things. It is also important for staff members to take vacations to refresh after a building project and to make sure they know that priorities are different during and immediately after the building project. In addition, give staff a few months to recover before taking on any major new projects or services. The building will be enough excitement for the community initially and you want to make sure you take time to plan new services and not implement them when your doors first open.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sandy Petrie came into the library world after spending thirteen years as a navigator in the Air Force. She left the Air Force in 1998 to spend more time with her family and was hired at the Noble County Public Library as the East Branch assistant and children's program director. In 2000 she was hired as director of the Noble County Public Library. She holds a BA in psychology, an MA in management, and an MLS.

